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CIA Opened Politicians' Mail, Senate Unit Is Told

Intercepted Letters Sent From Russia Included
One to Nixon, Another Written by Sen. Church

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WASHINGTON—The Central Intelligence Agency intercepted mail of "selected American politicians," including a staff aide's letter to former President Richard M. Nixon in 1968 and a note from Sen. Frank Church (D-Ida.) to his mother-in-law in 1971, congressional testimony disclosed Wednesday.

Both letters were mailed from the Soviet Union and thus fell under the previously acknowledged mail-intercept program that the CIA ran from 1953 to 1973.

As the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities, which Church heads, took its first public testimony on the CIA's mail-opening program, members agreed unanimously to ask Mr. Nixon to testify.

Church said the former President would be questioned on a wide variety of subjects, including any knowledge he may have of the CIA's long-secret mail-surveillance and his approval and subsequent rescission of the so-called "Huston Plan" for domestic spying in 1970.

The committee decided it would negotiate for Mr. Nixon's appearance rather than subpoena him, at least for the present. Herbert J. Miller Jr., Mr. Nixon's Washington lawyer, said he would take up the request with Mr. Nixon but would not speculate on his response.

On the mail-opening program, Spencer Davis, a committee spokesman, said investigators had determined that the CIA kept "a special file for correspondence to or from selected American politicians."

Although William E. Colby, the agency's director, has acknowledged that mail between the United States and the Soviet Union, China and other Communist countries was once examined regularly, the existence of a special politicians' file has not previously been disclosed.

Aside from his 1971 letter, Church said, selected mail to or from Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.) also had been opened, as well as mail of chairman Arthur F. Burns, of the Federal Reserve Board; the late Martin Luther King Jr., his wife, Coretta King; Rep. Bella S. Abzug (D-N.Y.), and Jay Rockefeller, former secretary of state of West Virginia and a nephew of the Vice President.

Church said some mail of Harvard University, the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation had also been opened by the CIA, but gave no details.

In addition, Sen. Walter F. Mondale (D-Minn.) read from a CIA "watch list" showing that certain letters of Nobel scientist Linus Pauling, author John Steinbeck and union leader Victor Reuther had once been intercepted.

Church said the agency had opened a letter to Mr. Nixon in June, 1968, from Ray Price, a staff assistant who was visiting the Soviet Union. That was shortly before Mr. Nixon was nominated as the Republican candidate for President.

The letter from Price, who later became a presidential speech writer, commented on Mr. Nixon's election prospects, Church said. It was addressed to Mr. Nixon at his New York law firm.

In testimony before the committee, James J. Angleton, former counterintelligence chief of the CIA, said the opening of the Nixon letter "was very much in error."

Angleton said the names of Pauling, Steinbeck and Reuther were on

a watch list requiring their mail to or from the Soviet Union to be opened.

"They would appear to be very patriotic, thoughtful Americans," Mondale said. "Why would you open their mail?"

After conferring with his attorney, James C. Brown, Angleton said: "I would like to respond to that question in executive session. I would like to review files in the agency before making a response."

The committee agreed to his request.

When asked later about his own intercepted letter, Church said he

had written to his mother-in-law, Mrs. Chase A. Clark, when he was traveling in the Soviet Union.

"I get along very well with my mother-in-law," he quipped. "What I said to her I thought I was saying to her and not to the CIA."

Church said letters to Kennedy from peace groups abroad had been intercepted by the Agency. At least one letter to Humphrey from the Soviet Union in 1958 had also been opened, he said. Kennedy, in a statement from his office, said, "There is no place in our society for this kind of behavior."

"Constituents should be free to write to their elected representatives and present their views without fear their letters will be seen by some agency of the government," he said. Humphrey called it "a prime example of bureaucratic arrogance, violation of the law and abuse of power."

"However," he added, "if they are going to read my mail, I wish they would start answering some of it."

There were no details given on Burns' mail surveillance. In a statement to newsmen, Burns said, "All I've got to go on is the news accounts. If true, it is outrageous."

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